



## March 2022 Newsletter

### Message from the Editor

Inspired is the word that comes to mind. There is spotlighting of IFP student experiences along with loving relationships with host families. This issue has delightful examples of how borders can be successfully bridged.

-Joseph Briller, Editor

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### Update from ISS

Happy Spring, IFP hosts and students! We hope your semester is going well and you are enjoying new IFP friendships begun this year.

Just a couple updates from ISS. Firstly, we are beginning to transition back to offering in-person IFP events. We are eager to meet up with you again and enjoy spring and summer events together. Look for a survey from ISS to give your input on events you would like to see us host going forward. As always, IFP follows Protect Purdue requirements and guidelines for activities and events.

Secondly, we have a new staff member assisting with ISS programming and events, Aaron Watson! You may have already seen him posting on the IFP Facebook group page as well as the ISS Instagram page. Aaron is a Lafayette native and a Purdue alum in Computer Graphics Technology. He grew up the youngest of five, with three older sisters and an older brother. They enjoy hanging out on the weekends--cooking, eating and playing board games together. Aaron is a jack-of-all-trades and enjoys creating art and design, both traditional and digital. He loves reading, computer gaming and baking cakes and cookies. (Right now he is perfecting a Japanese sponge cake!) He especially enjoys connecting with people and using his many and diverse skills to help others, especially international students. We are lucky to have him in ISS. Come meet Aaron at an upcoming event!

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## Upcoming Events

March and April are months when many Purdue international student organizations showcase cultural events for the whole campus community. What great opportunities these are for hosts, their families and students to experience other cultures close up. (Stay up-to-date on [cultural offerings through BoilerLink](#).)

A few events coming up in April:

Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>—MENA Gala from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the Co-Rec feature gym. Experience the many cultures of the Middle East and North Africa—through food, music, art forms and dance. Against the backdrop of Salaam, an Indy group performing Arabic music, students will give dance performances, host a fashion show and lead games and activities for all ages. Round out the evening enjoying a variety of tasty Arabic favorites.



Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>—Spring Fest 2022 is back! Head out to campus from 10:00 a.m. to 6 p.m. Visit the College of Veterinary Medicine Open House and the legendary Bug Bowl with cricket “spitting”, science and engineering demos and more! For details, visit the [official Spring Fest website](#).

Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup>—ISS Game Night from 7:30-9:30 p.m. in WALC 1018. Come on out to play your favorite board games with students, hosts and ISS staff. Bring a friend and join us!

Stay tuned to our social media profiles on Facebook at [ISSPurdue](#) and [International Friendship Program \(IFP\)](#) as well as our Instagram [@PurdueISS](#) for program and event updates from ISS.

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# The ISS Blog

## Reflecting on the Five Pillars

If you've been around Purdue for a while you've probably heard of [Purdue's Steps-To-Leaps](#) initiative and the [Five Pillars](#). Over the past year, ISS has reflected on how these learning pillars and the qualities they represent can shape and mold us and even transform us in becoming the best version of ourselves to those around us.

But we want to hear from you! Take a moment to look at the [ISS Blog post on each pillar](#), and then let us hear your thoughts and perspectives.

- Which pillar represents a growing edge in your life right now?
- Which quality do you see reflected in Boilermakers around you?
- How have your relationships in IFP spurred your growth in the five pillars?

Share your reflections at [friendship@purdue.edu](mailto:friendship@purdue.edu). We'd love to see the IFP community continue the conversation. We'll post your reflections in upcoming posts on our social media.

Thanks for taking the time to engage with one another!

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## Inspiring Connection, Inspiring Stories

Read on for some meaningful, inspiring, and unique stories from IFP partners like you.

### From Baku to Boiler

It was a long journey from the capital of Azerbaijan to West Lafayette for Elnara Mammadova, now a Purdue doctoral candidate in education, but an inspiring one all the same.

Growing up in Baku, Elnara loved its green areas, many fountains and being close to the Caspian, the world's largest inland sea. She is from a happy family with three sisters, much love and a mother whose penchant for jokes keeps everyone laughing.

Mom also had a serious side. Lacking educational opportunities for herself, mom encouraged Elnara and her sisters to study hard and break barriers. She advised them to define their goals and find their passions. Elnara's passion is to insure that students with disabilities can mix with the rest of the student population. As Elnara likes to say, "To live together in the same society we must develop curriculum to achieve that goal."

Elnara's mom also encouraged her children to expand their horizons by studying abroad, and Elnara took that advice to heart.

After visiting ten countries, Elnara was happy to finally land in the U.S., at JFK in New York. At first it was a bit overwhelming to navigate given the size of everything, from the massive number of cars to towering skyscrapers. She would need to adjust to America's unique and diverse culture.



Elnara was super excited to arrive on the Purdue campus, and was quickly impressed by its size and scope. She was eager to explore the area and found people friendly and helpful.

A student in one of her classes at the end of her first semester told her about IFP. Somehow Elnara had missed hearing about it but found out she could still join. Here's Elnara's account of meeting her hosts, Chris and Stephanie Christiansen for the first time.

"Meeting my host family was a tremendous experience. Stephanie and Chris invited my husband, Emre, and me over for dinner. From our first step into their house we felt a heartwarming welcome."

"It was unexpectedly surprising when I heard Azerbaijani music coming from somewhere inside the house. They searched for it and found it displayed on the TV screen! That was a touching moment for my husband and me. We both realized we had a place to be ourselves and had sincere conversation from that moment on. They cooked plenty of delicious food for us. We enjoyed our conversation a lot, learning and sharing similarities and differences between our cultures. Also, they shared lots of advice on navigating my academic pursuit at Purdue. I'm delighted that IFP helped me find a family I can run to for advice and support and feel at home."

Elnara is grateful for the opportunity to join IFP and encourages others to take advantage of this program and get to know others in deep and meaningful ways. "Share your stories, discover your passions and follow your dreams. In so doing you will help others as well."

## Coming Home

For IFP host Laurie Van Keppel it turned out to be one very big surprise. Hiding behind her daughter Kelsey was IFP student, Catherine Watson ready to pop out with hugs all around. An especially joyous Thanksgiving reunion was about to take place. Yes, it was 3,800 miles between Cath's home in Wales and Laurie's in West Lafayette, but miles cannot separate close friends. And Cath was more than that, she was simply a member of the family.

For Laurie, it was natural to become an IFP host. An exchange student herself while at IU, Laurie had studied in Switzerland and Austria. It had been a life changing experience. She truly understood how it felt to be an international student far from home.



Cath had previously studied in Finland and was eager to further her study abroad experience in the U.S. She studied tourism and hospitality, and appreciated how IFP welcomed her and matched her with Laurie.

Laurie reminisces about the time Cath became her IFP student. “We just clicked,” Laurie said. Cath remembers how their first lunch together didn’t end until midnight. For both it was the perfect match.



Cath became part of family gatherings, holidays, birthdays parties, a wedding, a shower, American football, and days at the family lake house. She and Laurie shared similar interests, and it was easy for them to find things to talk about. Cath also bonded with Laurie’s daughters and their friends. She enjoyed helping with the children and participated as a full-fledged member of the family. Laurie often told others how she loved her Welsh daughter.

Cath’s semester at Purdue was coming to an end, but she wasn’t ready to leave her American family. Working at Purdue, Laurie hoofed all over campus, helping Cath complete the paperwork for an extension. Mission accomplished! Cath was able to secure an internship and extend her stay.

Cath did come back for that Thanksgiving hug. Plotting with Kelsey, and friend Karli, the trip from Wales via Indy was kept under wraps until that magic moment. Laurie’s Welsh daughter had come home.

## Broadening Horizons

### Glimpses from Carol

Carol DeSutter was intrigued. The pastor of her church was recommending a program that promoted intercultural understanding. IFP needed host families, and it sounded like an exciting opportunity for broadening horizons.

After signing on, Carol and husband Joe met their assigned student Yitian “Vera” Hu from China. Carol started with Einstein. Although Purdue is a noted STEM school, this was not about science. Carol had a taste for bagels. So it was off to Einstein’s to share a popular American favorite.



Festive holidays, like Thanksgiving with family and friends, was another highlight Carol shared with Vera. Vera, now living in Canada with husband Shawn and their children, still rolls out the crescent rolls the same as Carol.

Beyond the food, holidays and family activities they shared was the incredible bond forged between them. Carol and Joe became mom and dad to Vera, a second set of parents along with Vera's parents at home in China.

Their family connection led to a very special event as Carol and Joe were invited to Vera and Shawn's wedding near Shanghai. Carol fondly remembers being treated as visiting royalty, as the two families bridged the vast Pacific.

Sharing a passion for food was one part of their bond, so it was no surprise that Carol and Joe were invited to dine with Vera's family in their home. Joe and Carol had the delightful experience of sampling authentic Chinese cuisine not always found in American establishments. Vera's Chinese parents were very appreciative of how Vera's American parents welcomed their daughter to Purdue.

Over time, another honor was bestowed on Carol and Joe. Vera named their first born son "Joey." Carol and Joe now enjoy their online family get-togethers with their "grandchildren."

## **Vistas from Vera**

Enroute to Purdue, Yitian "Vera" Hu could hardly know she was about to add three new members to her family. Stuck in Chicago with similar arrival delays was her future husband Shawn.

Arriving on campus, she received a warm Purdue welcome. Yet the magic moment took place at an IFP kickoff event. Vera was introduced to her host, Carol DeSutter, and quickly discovered their common interest in reading. Over the course of repeated semesters at Purdue, sharing family activities led to a special loving relationship. Carol and husband Joe became a second mom and dad, a home away from home, for Vera.

A highlight of their times together was sharing food from each other's cultures. There were visits to restaurants and cafes where Vera became acquainted with local cuisines. She and Shawn were invited for Thanksgiving, and on Vera's birthday, Carol made "long life noodles" honoring the Chinese symbol of long life, a Chinese tradition at birthday celebrations.

Other activities included exploring new places and being together at church events. But beyond happy shared activities, Vera appreciated the special aspects of family relationships she observed. She admired how Carol and Joe were open and honest with their children and grandchildren and caring for their own parents. For Vera it was easy to become part of this loving family.

When Vera and Shawn married in China, it was no stretch to include Carol and Joe. At the wedding and after Vera observed how both sets of parents bonded. What became apparent to Vera were the shared values that united them even though they were coming from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Today, Vera and Shawn live in Ottawa. A lasting sentiment of the special times with her American family belongs to her oldest son. He is Joey named after Carol's husband Joe.

## **In Conclusion**

Carol and Vera found that IFP for them did indeed broaden horizons and bridge borders. Though Shanghai and West Lafayette are geographically far apart, bonds formed through IFP widened their worlds while bringing them closer to home.



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## **Closing Thoughts**

IFP has had a tremendous impact on these IFP partnerships, and their stories highlight some precious memories. We hope they help you to fondly recall your own favorite moments or inspire you to seek out new friendships that cross cultures. If you have a story or photo you would like to share with IFP, please let us know and we will post them in the IFP Facebook group!

We wish you well as you finish out this year! See you at our next event!